

How to... care for Heathers

Part of the Pacific Nurseries
'How to...' series



Heathers are an attractive range of plants which can be used to provide a trouble free tapestry of colour throughout the year covering the ground and keeping weeds at bay. They can be in flower nearly all year round with their foliage differing with the seasons for a constantly changing display.

Siting and Cultivation: Heathers prefer an open situation with plenty of light. They are very hardy and will withstand the coldest of gardens. Avoid planting under trees as the water drips will rot off the plants.

Soil type: Preferably acidic but if not then the Erica group should be chosen - more tolerant to limey soils. Avoid heavy clay or very dry soils.

Versatile: Heathers are well suited to front of borders, rockeries and specialist heather beds. They may also be used for growing in large patio pots, particularly for winter arrangements. Small winter heathers make an interesting feature in a winter hanging basket.

Planting: Soak the pot thoroughly before removing the plant. Mix a generous handful of bone meal with a bucket of lime free compost and mix. Plant the heather in the mix, firm in gently and water in well.

Aftercare: Never allow heathers to dry out as they rarely survive. Once established apply a layer of peat around each heather in the autumn and in the spring. Heathers are not hungry feeders so avoid the use of strong granular fertilisers. If necessary use a weak liquid feed in the spring.

Pruning: A simple and essential task for the plant to flower with vigour and to prevent them from becoming leggy. As soon as flowering has finished use sharp shears to clip back to the base of the old flower shoot. Cut back any extra growth to shape - be bold.

Pests and Disease: Heathers suffer from very few pests: most disease arises from problems in the root system. Should browning of the foliage occur immediately drench with a general purpose fungicide. Scorch of the foliage is often caused by dogs, cats and foxes.

CHOOSING HEATHERS:

Erica carneas and erica x
~ winter flowering with flowers from December to April. Striking pinks, reds and white are very imposing in the winter.

~ these tend to grow a little taller and produce large bell shaped flowers in white, pink or red from June to October. Lush looking leaves.

~ these produce bushy tufts of flowers over either dark green or golden foliage.

~ They flower in the summer months and are low growing so should be kept to the front of any display. A wide range of strikingly bold coloured flowers.

~ this is the largest group of heathers. They flower during the summer months in a variety of colours. Foliage colours vary widely from grey to green and yellow to gold.

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